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ABSTRACT

Projections of college attendance over the next 15 years reveal that higher percentages of Americans will attend college, the student body will become more diverse, and the costs associated with the challenges of higher education will challenge state governments in particular to secure higher funding. In the next 15 years, approximately 1.6 million additional young adults will seek access to higher education, and a large proportion will be from low-income and minority families. The number of older students has been growing along with the number of younger students. Between 1999 and 2010, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) projects an increase of 9% in the number of students over age 25. NCES figures suggest that there will be somewhat fewer (under 22) than older students (over 22) in college over the next decade. Colleges will need to research and put into place educational approaches shown to be effective with diverse students, both young and old, and organize regular classes and distance learning to enhance student learning. (SLD)

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Projections for College Attendance by Younger and Older Students

September 2001

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES.
SEPTEMBER 2001

Greater Expectations National Panel

PROJECTIONS FOR COLLEGE ATTENDANCE BY YOUNGER AND OLDER STUDENTS

prepared by Ross Miller, AAC&U

Diversity in the college classroom increased during the second half of the twentieth century driven by (among other things) the GI bill, expansion of community colleges, progress in civil rights, advances in women's rights, the coming of age of the baby boom generation, and technology-related demands for knowledgeable and skilled workers. Projections for college attendance over the next fifteen years reveal that higher percentages of Americans will attend college, the student body will become even more diverse, and the costs associated with the expansion of higher education will challenge especially state governments to secure additional funding.

Traditional-age College Student Demographic Projections and Access Issues

In the next fifteen years, approximately 1.6 million additional young adults will seek access to higher education, a large proportion of them from low-income and minority families. Five states (California, Florida, Georgia, New York and Texas) will experience the most dramatic increases (ranging from 18% up to 50%) in the growth of their college-age populations from 2000-2015. Governors will be in the a unique and difficult position of finding resources to help minority and low-income youth (as well as others!) gain access to postsecondary education, and helping higher education institutions accommodate the burgeoning student population. Offsetting the expected additional national cost of $19 billion however, is a potential $230 billion added to the nation's income (as well-educated workers' salaries rise) and $80 billion in new tax revenues. Ensuring access to higher education, thus, has the potential to enhance significantly both social equity for low income families and the nation's long-run economic competitiveness.

Of the projected 1.6 million additional young college students during the next 15 years, approximately 200,000 will be African Americans and 400,000 Hispanics. In spite of these increases, it is likely that these groups will still be underrepresented in college. Carnevale and Fry note that increasingly diverse campuses and workplaces could well become more productive due to the positive (and well-researched) influences of learning and working in diverse circumstances -- an attractive bonus of increased access to college for all

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citizens.

To facilitate access for the next generation of students, we need, at the very minimum, to teach them how to get into college. Research shows that, given equal qualifications, Hispanic and white applicants are equally likely to attend college *if they complete the application process.* Many qualified Hispanic students simply do not complete the process, apparently because of a lack of information about the necessary steps. Expanded efforts in counseling and recruitment are needed. We also need to help all students learn.

Student aid policies may currently hinder access to postsecondary education for low-income and minority students. Aid has shifted toward middle-class students since the Middle Income Student Assistance Act of the Carter administration. Additionally, loans, tax-based relief, and merit-based aid all tend to favor middle class, not lower income, students. With new expectations of college attendance for all, regardless of family background and income, financial aid policies will need to be rewritten if access for the projected surge in low-income students is to translate into attendance.

Carnevale and Fry assert that currently, technology may add value but does not reduce costs. They believe that savings may be found through *performance-based reform* in which degrees are awarded according to outcomes-based standards and not simply time in classes. Unfortunately, they did not include additional details concerning performance-based reform in the paper cited here.

Projections for older students

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the number of older students has been growing along with the number of younger students. Between 1990 and 1999, the enrollment of students under age twenty-five increased by eight percent. During the same period, enrollment of persons 25 and over rose by seven percent. In 1997, the average age of community college students was 29, with 46% of students over the age of 25. From 1999 to 2010, NCES projects an increase of nine percent in the number of students over age twenty-five.

Projections of enrollments from 2000 through 2010 show nearly continuous increases for students of all ages and clearly illustrates the pronounced increase in the number of traditional age students -- those under 22. Calculating roughly from an NCES graph, it appears that there will be somewhat fewer younger (under twenty-two) than older students (over twenty-two) in college over the next decade. Even after subtracting graduate students (approx. 14%) from the total college enrollment figures, there will still be a strong presence of older students in undergraduate classrooms over the next decade.

Commentary

If student learning is to be the *sine qua non* of institutional quality in the next decade, higher education's response to the imminent changes in classroom

demographics will have to be thoughtful and swift. Colleges will need to research and put into place educational approaches shown to be effective with diverse students, both young and old, and organize both regular classes and distance learning to enhance student learning. Powerful curricula, research-proven pedagogies, and formative and summative assessment practices are and will be vital to fostering improved student learning. Achieving *Greater Expectations* for all during the next decade will require a singular focus by all stakeholders to build higher education's capacity to support *student learning*, learning for students of all ages and from an unprecedented variety of backgrounds.

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